



Forest Landowner Mentors

By Chad Fincher, Alabama TREASURE Forest Association

For many years the forestry community has struggled with its inability to reach the many uninformed or inactive forest landowners. We have an opportunity to change this! The question is, "Do we seize this opportunity?"

We have over 250,000 private forest landowners in our state. However only 10% have had any meaningful involvement with state or federal programs; state, federal, or local agencies; private or industrial professionals; and private landowner organizations. They have not been reached with the opportunities that are available to better manage their forestland. The Forest Landowner Mentors Program is designed to reach out to the 225,000 private forest landowners that still need to be contacted and provide the opportunity to educate them on the importance of sound forestry management. It is time to demonstrate to landowners the benefits that can be gained from actively implementing some type of management practice on their forestland. We want to identify these landowners and draw them into the information network, into our community of forest stewards.

Forest Landowner Mentors (FLM) is designed to reach out to the many forest landowners who may not be aware of the myriad of benefits, economic and otherwise, they can gain from their forestland and the opportunities for becoming involved in activities with other forest landowners. This program is a national pilot program developed by the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association (ATFA) and Private Forest Management Team (PFMT), in partnership with the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC)

and USDA Forest Service, industry, and forestry consultants.

The program will identify landowners who are not actively managing their property from a new database that is being developed by the PFMT and AFC. In an effort to contact the landowner, a forest mentors publication will be sent to them describing the benefits of sustainable forestry management. Articles will be written specifically to educate the landowner about the potential benefits of forest and natural resource management. A cover letter will be provided with the publication to explain the purpose of the material and give the landowner the name and phone number of a forest mentor in their county that can provide them with additional information.

After a landowner has been contacted the forest mentor will invite the landowner to a group field trip and sharing session in their county. Individual one-on-one mentoring will also be offered where a forest mentor will invite the landowners out to their forest to show them first-hand the importance of sustainable forestry management.

The FLM training will not focus on providing professional assistance to the landowners. Rather, it will try to improve the mentoring landowner's knowledge of forestry management practices, how these best can be conveyed to uninformed landowners, and how they can motivate these landowners. The forest mentor will educate the landowner on the economic value of their forest and assist the landowner in the process of claiming that economic value while continuing to practice sustainable forest management. They will reach out to a neighboring landowner in their community and encourage that landowner to become involved in county and state forestry activities. If the landowner needs and desires professional forestry assistance, the forest mentor will direct

them to appropriate state, private, or industrial professionals.

The FLM National Pilot Program will interact with private forest landowners on the state, regional, and national level. ATFA members in Alabama will be trained in county sessions as forest mentors on how to best approach the landowner, what they should and should not say, do, or recommend. On the regional level, three southern region states that wish to participate in the program will be identified. An FLM coordinator from each state will be trained and the program's progress will be monitored in each state. Nationally, a state representing three regions of the U.S. (South, North East, and West) will be selected and the regional process of training and follow-up will be conducted at this level.

This project has the potential to reach a large number of forest landowners in Alabama and motivate active landowners to share their forests and values with the community. It will take a coordinated effort among a variety of organizations to accomplish this project, but the potential rewards are tremendous. ♣

For more information about the **Forest Landowner Mentors Program**, please contact:

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